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Steven Katsaris and Howard Oliver deliver petition to Temple pastor —Joe Price Jr.

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Peoples Temple in Guyana is 'prison,' relatives say

By BOB KLOSE
Staff Writer

SAN FRANCISCO — "Concerned Relatives," a group of Northern Californians with relatives living on the South American agricultural mission of the controversial Peoples Temple Church, Tuesday charged their loved ones are being held captive, possibly under threat of death, by Rev. James Jones.

A long list of accusations, signed by 25 relatives of 37 residents of "Jonestown" in Guyana, was delivered to the Peoples Temple headquarters here.

The group, whose charges were documented by sworn affidavits from at least one former member of the agricultural mission and the Ukiah father of a current mission resident, demanded Jones allow their relatives a one-week visit home at the group's expense.

The group Tuesday said the visit would allow church members to decide freely whether to return to Guyana. If they choose to go back to Guyana, the relatives said they will not interfere.

Peoples Temple spokesman Sandra Ingram today siad the accusations are "malicious lies."

"We are looking into suing," she told The Press Democrat. "Those people have talked to their relatives. This is simple harrassment."

Ingram cited a purported report by the U.S. Embassy in Guyana which she claimed said: "People are very happy and want to remain in Guyana."

Ingram criticized the group for its tactivs and urged no mention of them in the press.

"We do not speak for individuals. Maybe those in the petition do. We do not believe in this kind of dictatorship. We're very converned that nothing be printed in the press until the whole side of the story is given," she said.

The group Tuesday was led by Steven Katsaris, Ukiah, and Howard Oliver, San Francisco. Katsaris has a daughter in Guyana and Oliver two sons.

Katsaris, director of the Trinity School for children in Mendocino

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County, said the group would "employ every legal and diplomatic avenue open to us" to force Rev. Jones to comply with the demands.

Katsaris and about 50 persons, most from the Bay Area and many former members of the church, delivered the demands to an associate pastor who was aorking a parking lot and storage yard at the rear of the building one Geary Boulevare in San Francisco. Repeated attempts to communicate with church officials at the front entrance failed, although officials watched from Temple windows as Katsaris passed the documents through a chain link fence to church workers.

The introduction to the document said:

"We, the undersigned, are grief-stricken parents and relatives of the . . . persons you arranged to be transported to Guyana . . . We are advised tjere are not telephones or exit roads from Jonestown, and that you now have more than 1,000 U.S. citizens living with you there.

"We have allowed nine months to pass since you left the United States in June 1977. Although certain of us knew it would do no good to wait before making a group protest, others of us were willing to wait to see whether you would in fact respect the fundamental freedoms and dignity of our children and family members in Jonestown.

"Sadly, your conduct over the past year has shown such a flagrant and cruel disregard for human rights that we have no choice as responsible people but to make this public accusation and to demand the immediate elimination of these outrageous abuses."

The charges said alleged conduct by Jones violates the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the United Nations in 1948, and the constitutions of the U.S. and Republic of Guyana.

Jones is accused of using physical intimidation and psychological coercion as part of a mind-programming campaign against mission residents; prohibiting members from leaving Guyana; depriving them their rights to privacy, free speech and freedom of association; and making a threat designed to cause relatives to fear for the lives of mission residents.

The charges allege Jones prohibits telephone calls and contact with "outsiders," censors all mail, prevents residents from seeing relatives who travel to Guyana and extorts the silence of relatives in the U.S. by threats to stop all communications.

The specter of death is raised by the group using Jones' own words. The group said a letter Jones sent last month sent to members of the Senate and House ended with a "chilling threat."

"It is equally evident that people cannot forever be continually harrassed and beleagured by such tactics without seeking alternatives that have been prevented. I can say, without hesitation that we are devoted to a decision that it is better even to die than to be constantly harrassed from one continent to the next," Jones' letter is quoted as saying.

"We frandkly do not know if you have become so corrupted by power that you would actually allow a collective "decision" to die, or whether your letter is simply a bluff designed to deter investigations into your practices," the group's charges said Tuesday.

The group demanded Jones clarify the "decision" to choose death over harrassment.

Adding credence to their concerns was a sworn statement by Yolanda D. A. Crawford, San Francisco, who spent three months in Guyana last year.

"Jim Jones prior to June said that people would be coming to live in Guyana for a temporary period of time. In June Jim Jones stated that the people he brings over from the United States will be staying in Guyana 'permanently'," Crawford's statement said.

"Jim Jones said that nobody will be permitted to leave Jonestown and that he was going to keep guards stationed around Jonestown to keep anybody from leaving. He said that he had guns and that if anyone tries to leave they will be killed and their bodies will be left in the jungle and 'we can say that we don't know what happened to you'," she said.

Crawford also quotes Jones as saying: "I can get a hit man for $50" and that he had "Mafia connections."

In a sworn statement, Katsaris said he learned his daughter Maria has entered the "innermost governing body" of the church but that steps had been taken to assure her loyalty.

"I ascertained from people who had firsthand knowledge that Maria had been required to sign an undated suicide note that could be used to explain her disappearance should she ever attempt to leave the hurch," Katsaris said.

Katsaris traveled to Guyana twice last year to see his daughter. He saw her once in the company of two U.S. Embassy officials and four church members.

"It wasn't my daughter I saw but a completely different person," Katsaris told The Press Democrat. In his statement, he declined to return his embrace, was suspicious, hostile and paranoid and accused him of being part of a consipracy against the church.

Tuesday he said he hasn't heard from her since.

Crawford said Jones has stated he could silence his critics by accusing them of being homosexuals, child abusers, terrorists or sexual deviates.

Katsaris's statement said Maria "had been required to sign statements that the children's residential treatment center that I direct was involved in a gigantic welfare fraud, that it was staffed by child molesters and homosexuals, that I myself was a child molester, and had sexually abused one of the girls in the program . . . "

Katsaris also said church officials told U.S. Embassy officials that Katsaris had sexually molested his daughter.

In San Francisco today, church spokesman Ingram said Katsaris' daughter "will continue to state this because it is the truth."

Also cited was the case of Timothy Stoen, former deputy district attorney for Mendocino and San Francisco counties, and his estranged wife, Grace, who were deeply involved in the church when it operated its facility in Redwood Valley.

TIM STOEN

—Joe Price Jr.

Concerned relatives leaders Steven Katsaris; left, and Howard Oliver

Stoen, present at the confrontation Tuesday but remaining in the background, and his wife, are currently fighting Jones for custody of the Stoen's six-year-old son.

Grace Stoen left the church in 1975. Her husband followed after learning of the alleged physical abuses suffered by church members at the hands of Jones and church leaders.

The Stoen's boy remains in Guyana and Jones claims he is the boys natural father by Mrs. Stoen. The Stoens brought habeas corpus proceedings in Guyana last year and still are await a decision.

Ingram said today Jones has not returned to the U.S. because of the custrody case on the advice of his attorneys.

Stoen said Tuesday's action represents thefirst organized attempt to determine the status of church members, many of whom reportedly left the U.S. saying they would be back in a few weeks but haven't been seen since.

Previously, Stoen said, relatives ere too "terrified" to act.

Signers of the petition include persons with parents, grandparents, wisters and brothers, cousins, even entire families living in Guyana.

The "fear of reprisal" is illustrated in a letter a 15-year-old church member wrote to her grandmother which noted her grandmother's taking her concerns to the media.

The letter concludes:

"I am sorry to hear that you called the radio station but since you did I will not be writing you any more."